

Building stronger immigrant communities – one family, one person at a time

DACA Restored!

December 4, 2020 was a red-letter day for dozens of AIS clients: a federal district court ordered USCIS to take immediate steps to put into effect the Supreme Court's June decision, overturning the 2017 Trump administration attempt to end DACA. The recalcitrant agency had continued to reject initial DACA applications, shutting youth off from work authorization and relief from removal.

AIS's phone was soon ringing non-stop as young people leapt at this opportunity. "Their enthusiasm is just incredible," states Sr. Luisa, whose zeal matches that of her clients as they gather documentation to establish presence in the United States since June 2007, a key DACA requirement.

DACA was first implemented over eight years ago. The accomplishments of AIS DACA clients in that time — university degrees, professional careers, house purchases— testify to the life-changing power of "the 9 magic numbers," on a Social Security card, as one client termed them.

But DACA grants only temporary relief; a path towards legal permanent residence and citizenship is needed. Both the 2021 DREAM Act and President Biden's US Citizenship Act of 2021 would accomplish this goal.

Stand with DACAmended youth by letting your Senators and Representatives know you support these bills. The time for promises is long over; now is the moment for action!

Visit [Senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov) and [House.gov](https://www.house.gov) and look at the very top of the page for "Find my—". Call, email, or write! For another resource, see [JusticeForImmigrants.org](https://www.justiceforimmigrants.org)



Congratulations to 17 AIS clients who achieved citizenship in 2020!

The Fruit of Collaboration

Since June 2020, about 40 families stop by AIS each week to pick up produce, bread, and other food items. This program's existence testifies to the power of collaboration.

In early 2020, AIS began providing clients with information on the Census, ultimately reaching 2000 households! This outreach increased awareness of pandemic-related food insecurity, an experience shared by other nonprofits city-wide and discussed in weekly calls coordinating Census promotion.

AIS connected with nonprofit food providers: *Havenly Treats* is a café that employs immigrant and refugee women to create delicious hot meals, and *Haven's Harvest* rescues large quantities of excess food from markets, university kitchens and



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Thank you, donors! You make this work possible!

Listing includes donations received 12/14/2019-12/31/2020

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Left: Pop-up food pantry at AIS
 Right: Sisters help with food distribution

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Special shout-out to these folks who had birthday fundraisers for AIS on Facebook:

Misty Maza, Linda Roberto,
 Tegwyn Stockdale, Alonso Villegas

Can you help spread the good word about AIS?

Word of mouth, social media, email, even passing on this newsletter when you are done reading it!

Gracias, Erika!

In October, AIS bid a very fond farewell to staff member Erika Vergara. For over 6 years, Erika was a voice of welcome, a fierce advocate for clients, an excellent mentor to staff and volunteers, and a wonderful colleague. We will miss her and wish her happiness in her new adventures! We know she will continue to be a passionate force for justice. Si, se puede!



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other venues. From this combination of opportunity and need, AIS' weekly food distribution program was born.

Members of local Apostle of the Sacred Heart communities collect, sort, and distribute food donations into boxes for pickup. "The Sisters live together, so it is safe for them to work together in our enclosed space," explains Sr. Luisa, who oversees food distribution. Grants and donations fund gift cards for purchase of non-food items. Sacred Heart Academy, a high school run by the Apostles, sponsored an online campaign which provided food staples as well as gloves, socks and scarves for participating families.

"Our capacity is limited, so we connect clients with other resources first," states Natalia Sidito, client communication coordinator. "We deliver food to those who can't travel and stay open later so that people can stop by after work," she explains. "When their situations improve they tell me, 'Take us off the list so you can help someone else.' It is just amazing."

From Victims to Victors

Violence can leave victims shattered and traumatized, but their story need not end there! This year, clients celebrated their victory over adversity with the receipt of work authorization or legal permanent residence through "U status." For each of them, receipt of their government IDs – tangible proof of their legal status – was an emotional moment. (One client's son took photographs of her as she opened the envelope containing her green card, to preserve the moment in family history!)

U status is available to those who were substantially harmed by crimes of violence and who cooperated with law enforcement in subsequent investigation or prosecution. Some family members can receive derivative U status.

But only 10,000 "principal" applications can be granted every year. Clients who received their green cards in 2020 had begun the process of applying for U status over 8 years before! The current wait time for someone who applies today is well over 10 years.

Because of USCIS failure to implement the law's provisions for those "in line," applicants lack status and work authorization for most of that time. Yet clients continue to make the bold decision to apply for U status so that they can move forward

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toward their dream of a safe and happy future. Thank you for standing with them!

The requirements for each step in the process are daunting and demanding. **These families have access to legal representation and the security to which it leads because of your generosity.**

Congratulations to Sr. Luisa Villegas, who became a Department of Justice Accredited Representative in May 2020.

We've moved!

In early January, AIS moved to 115 Blatchley Avenue, about 100 yards from our prior location. The building, formerly the parish office of St. Rose, also houses the Springs Learning Center, which assists adults learning English as a second language.

THANKS to all who gave of time and talent to help including many Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and parishioners of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish.



From the Director's desk...

The past year was a time of struggle for immigrant communities suffering from the cumulative punitive policies of the Trump administration while bearing the weight of the pandemic disproportionately, as essential workers often underserved by our health care system. But 2021 has renewed our hope: through working with Fair Haven Community Health Care to get clients vaccinated against Covid 19; a "fresh start" in our new location; the roll-back of punitive immigration policies; and legislation that proposes a path to citizenship for those currently living without legal immigration status. Like a crocus pushing through the late-winter snow, the recent news of a client's receipt of his immigrant visa after a year of consular shut-downs presages good things to come!

Your support enabled clients to survive and thrive through many challenges: thank you! We know that you will enable our immigrant families to benefit from increased opportunities in the year to come!

Gratefully, Sr. Mary Ellen Burns

Email ais.fairhaven@gmail.com to be included on our email list and keep up with the latest AIS news.

NEW ADDRESS!



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